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CONFIDENTIAL TUNIS 001953

PARIS FOR ALLEGRONE

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PGOV TS
SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA REPORTEDLY STILL
GOING STRONG

¶1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

¶2. FORMER MINISTER OF STATE MOHAMED SAYAH TOLD
POLOFF ON MARCH 28 THAT EX-PRESIDENT HABIB BOURGUIBA
APPEARED WELL AND IN GOOD SPIRITS WHEN SAYAH VISITED
HIM IN MONASTIR LAST WEEK. SAYAH SAID HIS LATEST
MEETING WITH BOURGUIBA WAS THE SIXTH TIME THAT THE
GOT HAS PERMITTED HIM TO VISIT THE NONAGENARIAN
FORMER PRESIDENT SINCE BOURGUIBA WAS REMOVED BY THEN
PRIME MINISTER ZINE EL ABIDINE BEN ALI ON NOVEMBER 7,
¶1987. ACCORDING TO SAYAH, BOURGUIBA CANNOT LEAVE HIS
RESIDENTIAL COMPOUND OR RECEIVE VISITORS (EXCEPT FOR
HIS SON WHO SEES HIM TWICE A WEEK) WITHOUT INTERIOR
MINISTRY AUTHORIZATION, WHICH SAYAH CLAIMED WAS
USUALLY WITHHELD. SAYAH SAID THAT HE FOUND BOURGUIBA
IN GOOD HEALTH FOR HIS AGE, ABLE TO WALK AROUND WITH
ASSISTANCE, AND CAPABLE OF LUCIDLY EXPOUNDING AT
LENGTH ON VARIOUS SUBJECTS (THE FORMER PRESIDENT
DWELT ON ASPECTS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND ISLAMIC
DOCTRINE DURING SAYAH'S RECENT VISIT). BOURGUIBA
STUDIOUSLY AVOIDED COMMENTING ON CURRENT DOMESTIC
POLITICAL ISSUES, SAID SAYAH.

¶3. THE TUNISIAN MEDIA LAST WEEK HIGHLIGHTED
PRESIDENT BEN ALI'S NOMINATION OF BOURGUIBA FOR THE
1995 "NEHRU PRIZE," WHICH IS REPORTEDLY AWARDED BY
INDIA TO PERSONALITIES WHO WORK TOWARD UNDERSTANDING,
PEACE, AND FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLES. DESCRIBING
THE NOMINATION AS NOBLE AND CIVILIZED, THE PRESS
PRAISED BOTH BEN ALI FOR MAKING THE GESTURE AND
BOURGUIBA AS DESERVING OF THE AWARD.

¶4. COMMENT: MORE THAN SEVEN YEARS AFTER HIS
REMOVAL, HABIB BOURGUIBA REMAINS A VENERATED FIGURE
IN TUNISIA, AND BEN ALI IS CAREFUL TO PAY PROPER
HOMAGE TO FOUNDER OF THE MODERN TUNISIAN STATE, WHOM
THE PRESIDENT APPEARS TO RESPECT SINCERELY. SAYAH, A
CENTRAL PLAYER IN THE PRE-1987 JOCKEYING FOR THE
EVENTUAL SUCCESSION TO BOURGUIBA, HAS BEEN OUT OF A
JOB AND UNDER 24-HOUR POLICE SURVEILLANCE SINCE BEN
ALI BECAME PRESIDENT.

CASEY